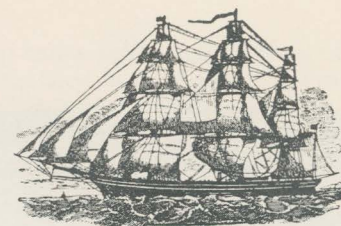


SEA LETTER

Published by the San Francisco Maritime Museum

ROBERT E. MAYER, *President* KARL KORTUM, *Director*



Volume 2, Nos. 2 and 3, October 1964

ANITA VENTURA, *Editor*



The heart of Gold Rush San Francisco: A section of the five-part panorama in the collection of the California Historical Society shows the Portsmouth Square area of the city in 1851.

GOLD RUSH PANORAMAS San Francisco—1850 to 1853

The Gold Rush was among the first events of world-wide interest to be reported photographically. Daguerreotypists, whose art had advanced in practice and popularity since its introduction in 1839, joined the rush to California soon after President Polk's dramatic announcement in December 1848 of the discovery of gold. Their luminous, silver-covered plates caught their subjects with an accuracy of detail and brilliance of tone that is impossible to reproduce here, but which has not been surpassed since the method was replaced by the negative process. Here they produced panoramic views of San Francisco as well as portraits that were sent to families in the Eastern States or Europe. It was not only the magnitude of the Gold Rush, but the situation of the city itself, its hills and reach of bay, the tall-masted vessels that filled its harbor (526 in June 1850), the port for the fabulous fields, that must have extended the daguerreotypist's imagination and encouraged him to swing his camera in an arc to record the sweep of the scene in four, five and six separate plates. The *Alta California* for February 1, 1851 thus describes a panorama by S. C. McIntyre, a dentist from Florida turned daguerreotypist, who offered to duplicate his effort for \$100:

"Decidedly the finest thing in the fine arts produced in this city, which we have seen, is a consecutive series of Daguerrean

plates, five in number, arranged side by side so as to give a view of our entire city and harbor, the shipping, bay, coast and mountains opposite, islands, dwellings and hills—all embraced between Rincon Point on the right, to the mouth of our beautiful bay on the left . . . It is a picture, too, which cannot be disputed—it carries with it evidence which God himself gives through the unerring light of the world's great luminary. . . . This will tell its own story, and the sun to testify to its truth. . . ."

It is this verity of record that has turned the San Francisco Maritime Museum in recent years to the study and discovery of daguerreotype panoramas. Mr. Albert Harmon, Museum Librarian, has made an intensive study of the panoramas which has led to more exactly dating them, and he has also discovered particular buildings in them for which no photographic record has been previously known. In the attached article he tells the story of this rewarding and exciting expansion of our view of Gold Rush San Francisco. We publish here four views, three of them from Nob Hill, a favored vantage point; a subsequent issue of *SEA LETTER* will present panoramas of the same period from Rincon Point. At this time there are eight known panoramas of San Francisco dating from 1850-1853; we hope that with this publication more may come to light to further inform and delight us by their testimony.—A. V.



The Gold Rush waterfront: "Forest of Masts," a two-part daguerreotype panorama the right plate of which is in the Zelda Mackay Collection of Bancroft Library, University of California. The location of the other plate is not known. This panorama was taken from the roof of the Union Hotel in Portsmouth Square, shown on page 1. It is believed to date from late 1850.

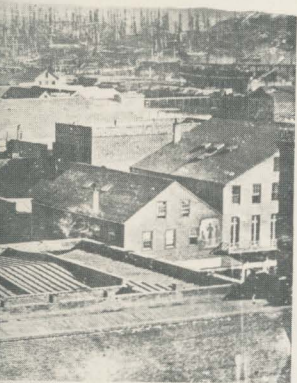
From North Beach to Rincon Point before the Great Fires of 1851: The panorama in the collection of George Eastman House, below, was taken between January 19, 1851, and May 3, 1851, possibly earlier. The January 19 date is established by the presence in this view of the First Presbyterian Church, which was dedicated on that day, and the latter date by the beached ships NIANITIC and APOLLO, which were destroyed in the fire that started shortly before midnight on May 3 and raged during the day of May 4. The daguerreotype plates were found in Paris by Mr. Beaumont Newhall, Director of the George Eastman House. The vignettes accompanying this and the following panoramas are taken from Soule's *Annals of San Francisco* and contemporary letter sheets and prints. The 1850 drawing of the NIANITIC is from the collection of the San Francisco Maritime Museum.



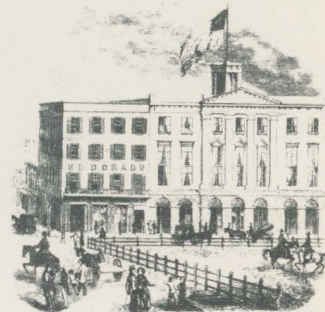
First Presbyterian Church

*West side of Dupont between Pacific and Clay.
Destroyed in the fire of June 22, 1851.*





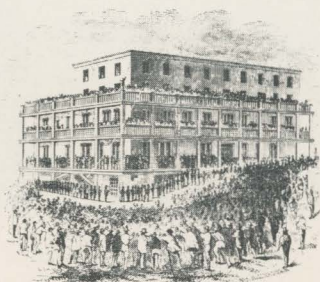
Telegraph Station
Atop Telegraph Hill.



Jenny Lind Theatre
On Kearny, facing
(Portsmouth Square).
Burned in all of the
fires that swept through
between December 1850
and June 22, 1851.
Each time. Purchased
by the city and again
rebuilt used as the
city hall.



Vallejo Street Catholic Church
On Vallejo near Dupont.

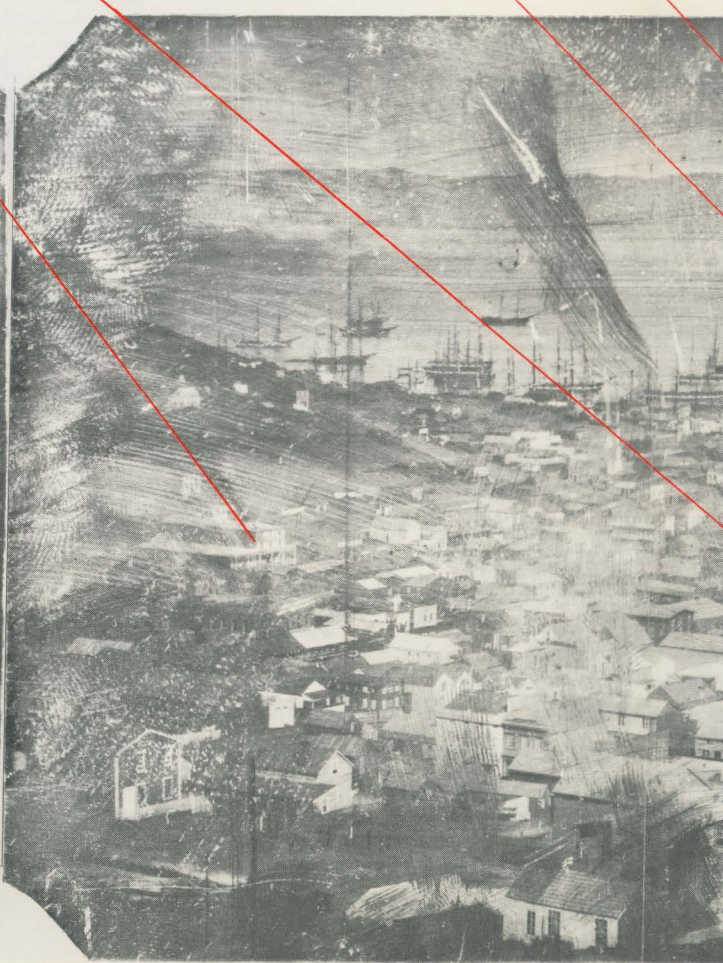


City Hall
At Kearny and Pacific. Destroyed
in the fire of June 22, 1851.

Richardson Adobe
In the middle of the block diagonally west
off Dupont, between Washington and Clay.



St. Francis Hotel
At the corner of Clay and Dupont.



Wind Theatre
 (facing the Plaza
 mouth Square).
 in all of the six major
 at swept the city
 in December 24, 1849
 on 22, 1851. Rebuilt
 in 1852. Purchased in 1852
 city and after refurb-
 used as the City Hall.



Storeship APOLLO
 Northwest corner of Battery and Sacramento.
 Destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851.



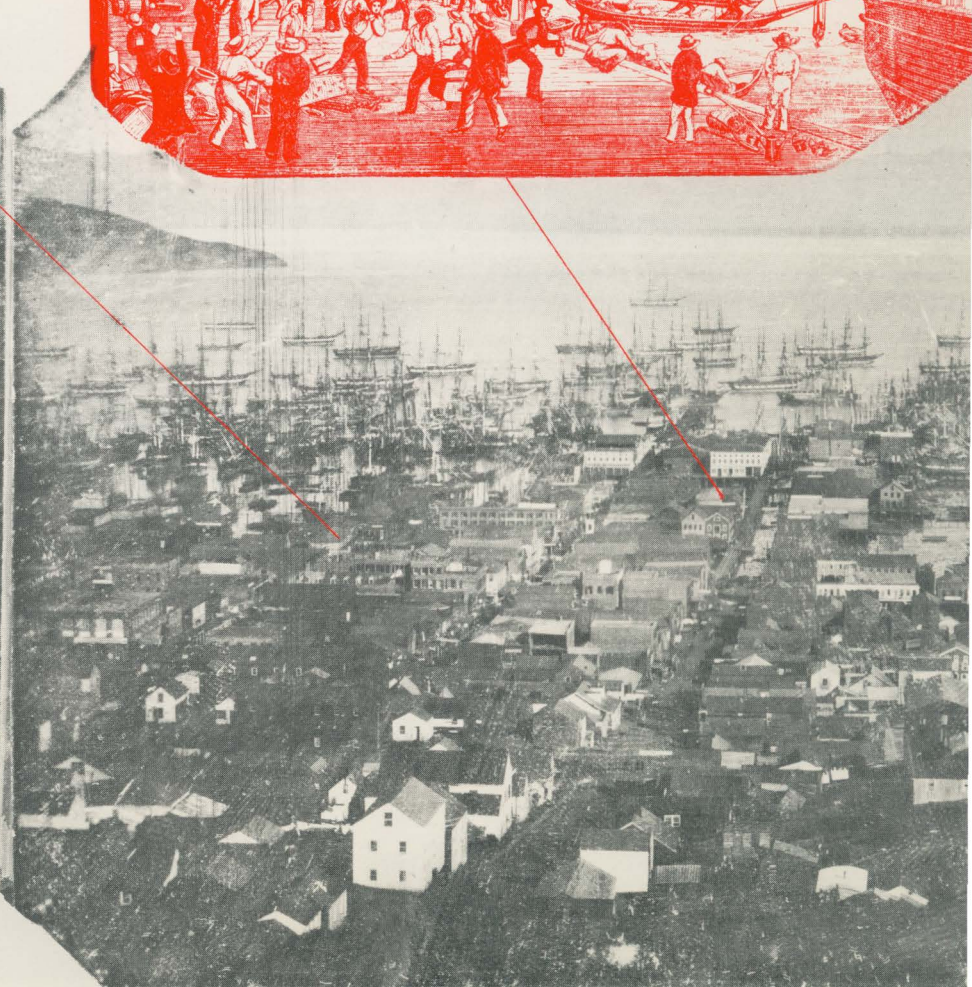
Tehema House
 At the corner of Sansome and
 California.



Custom House
 At Market and California.
 Destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851.



Storeship NIANTIC
 Northwest corner of Sansome and Clay.
 Destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851.



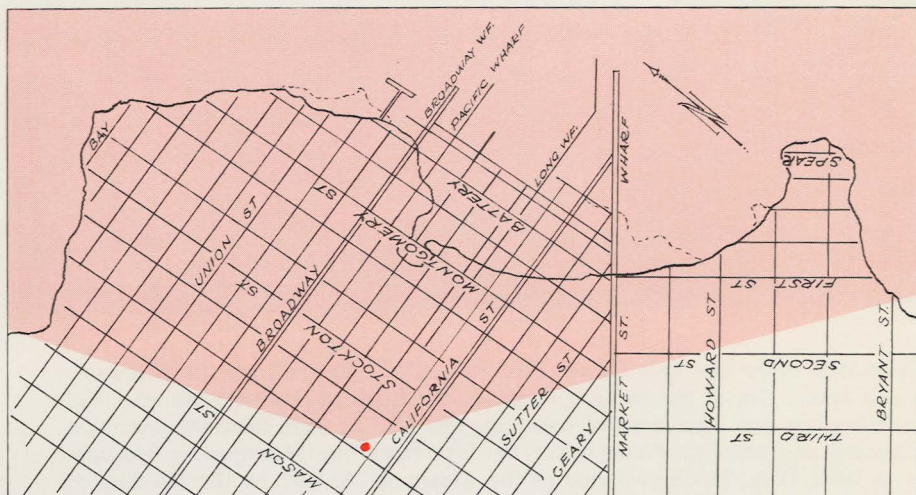


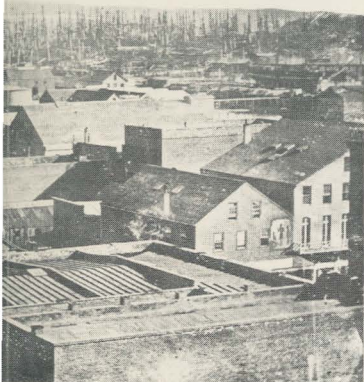
Eastman House
 Montgomery and California.
 Destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851.

The scope of the view from Nob Hill: The map below shows the situation of the daguerreotypist atop Nob Hill and the scope of the view in the Eastman House panorama. Because early tripods had no panoramic heads by which the daguerreotypist could mechanically swing his camera, its position was changed by hand. This resulted in overlaps or gaps at the joining edges, especially evident in the two sections below that include Alcatraz Island. The vertical register is also usually uneven. A result of the length of time needed for exposure and development is described by Charles Meryon, the French engraver who worked from a daguerreotype panorama: "The material on which I had to work consisted of a Daguerre panorama on plates composed of five small square views, made consecutively, perhaps on the same day, but in any case at different hours—since one of the end pieces was lighted from one side, while the other was lighted from the opposite side." An excellent proof of the engraving of which Meryon speaks has recently been acquired by the San Francisco Maritime Museum.

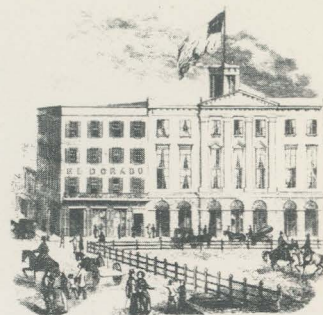


Oriental Hotel
 At Bush and Battery.





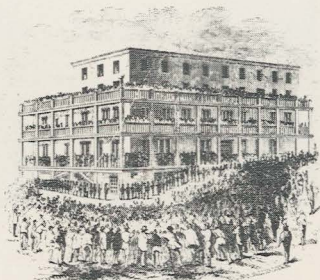
Telegraph Station
Atop Telegraph Hill.



Jenny Lind
On Kearny
(Portsmouth)
Burned in
fires that
between 1849
and June 22,
each time
by the city
bishing us



Vallejo Street Catholic Church
On Vallejo near Dupont.

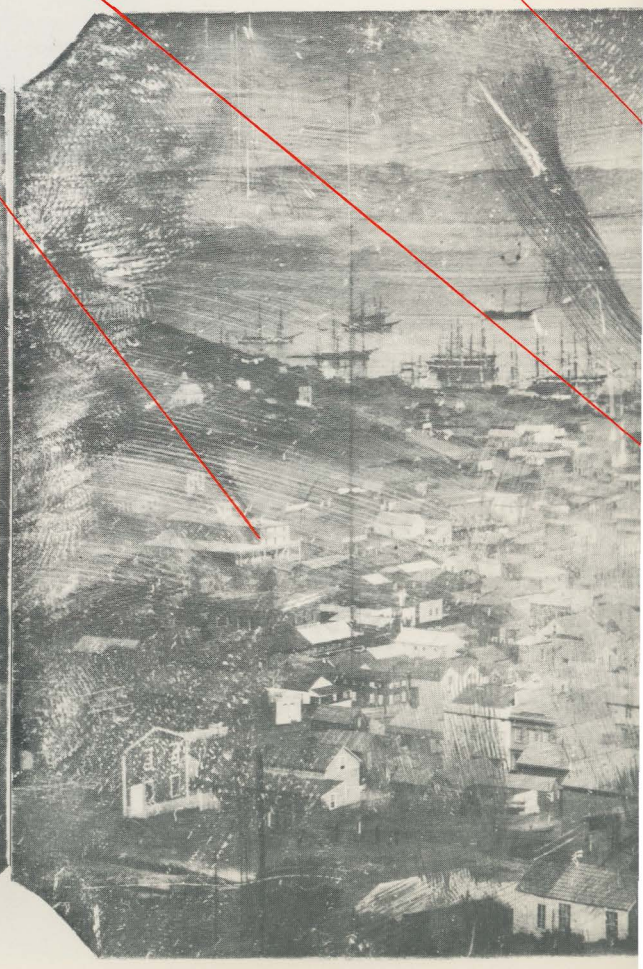


City Hall
At Kearny and Pacific. Destroyed
in the fire of June 22, 1851.



St. Francis Hotel
At the corner of Clay and Dupont.

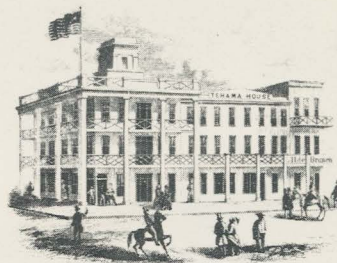
Richardson Adobe
In the middle of the block diagonally west
off Dupont, between Washington and Clay.



nd Theatre
ny, facing the Plaza
uth Square).
n all of the six major
swept the city
December 24, 1849
22, 1851. Rebuilt
e. Purchased in 1852
ty and after refurb-
ed as the City Hall.



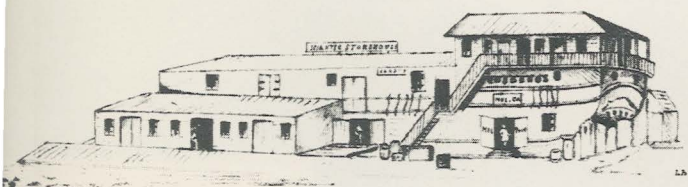
Storeship APOLLO
Northwest corner of Battery and Sacramento.
Destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851.



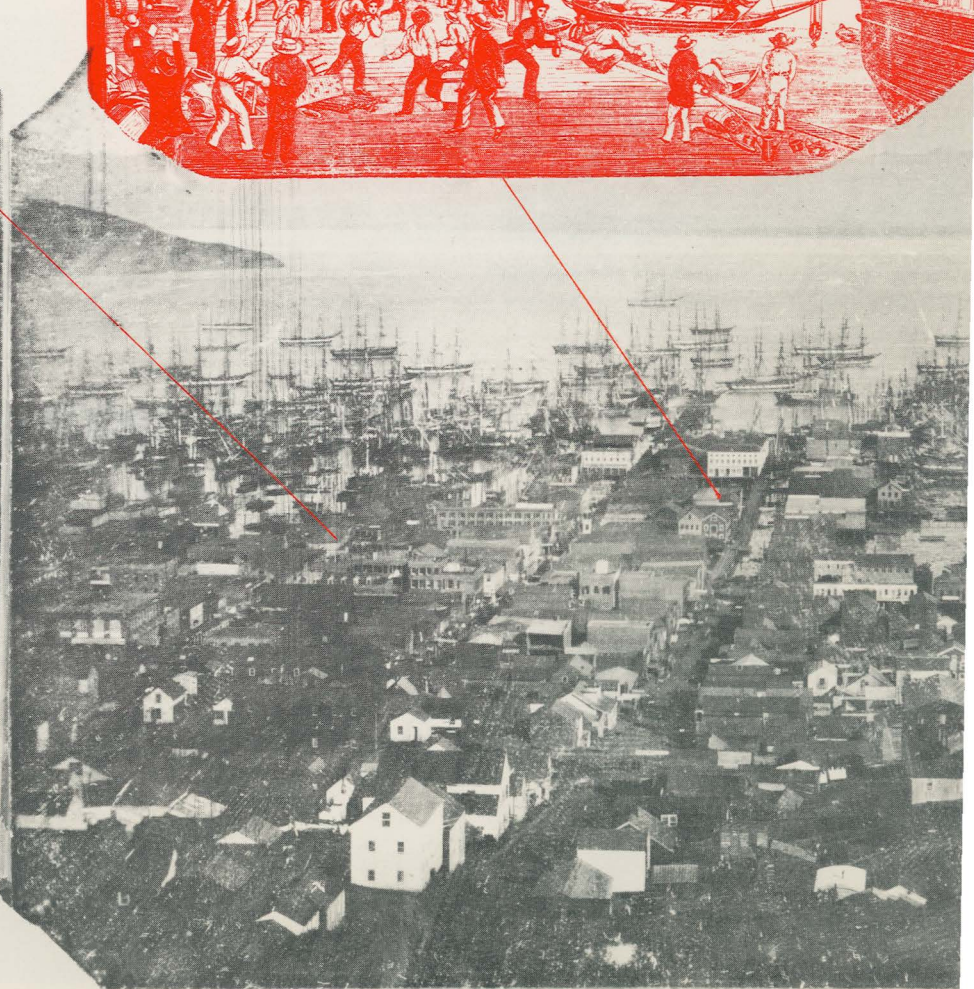
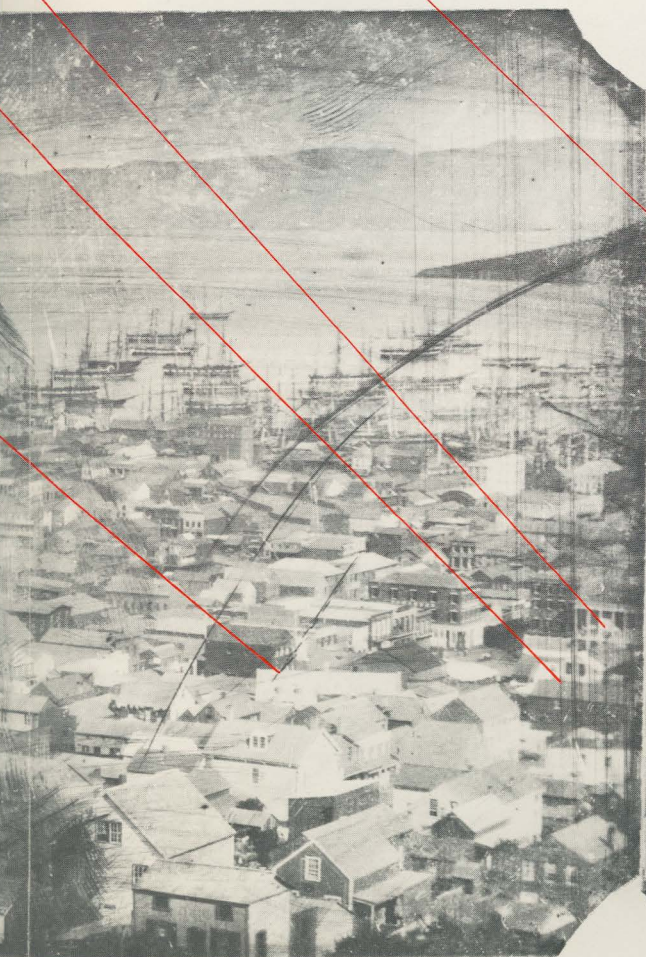
Tehema House
At the corner of Sansome and
California.

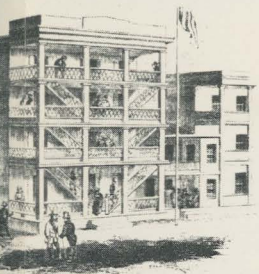


Custom House
At Mo...
Destro...



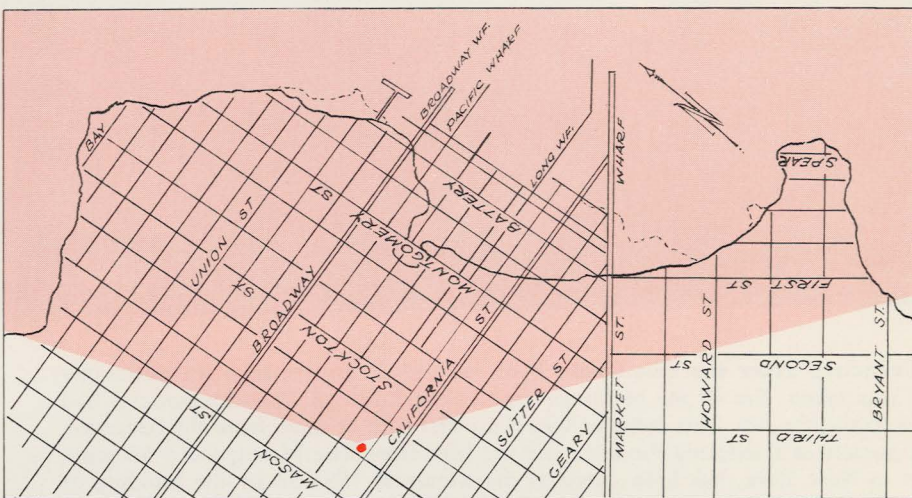
Storeship NIANTIC
Northwest corner of Sansome and Clay.
Destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851.





Eastman House
 Montgomery and California.
 Destroyed in the fire of May 4, 1851.

The scope of the view from Nob Hill: The map below shows the situation of the daguerreotypist atop Nob Hill and the scope of the view in the Eastman House panorama. Because early tripods had no panoramic heads by which the daguerreotypist could mechanically swing his camera, its position was changed by hand. This resulted in overlaps or gaps at the joining edges, especially evident in the two sections below that include Alcatraz Island. The vertical register is also usually uneven. A result of the length of time needed for exposure and development is described by Charles Meryon, the French engraver who worked from a daguerreotype panorama: "The material on which I had to work consisted of a Daguerre panorama on plates composed of five small square views, made consecutively, perhaps on the same day, but in any case at different hours—since one of the end pieces was lighted from one side, while the other was lighted from the opposite side." An excellent proof of the engraving of which Meryon speaks has recently been acquired by the San Francisco Maritime Museum.



Oriental Hotel
 At Bush and Battery.



GOLD RUSH PANORAMAS

The View from Nob Hill

by Albert M. Harmon

The San Francisco Maritime Museum's initial interest in panoramic views of the city began when we were asked to provide historical material for the Golden Gateway, a building project that is raising a vast complex of apartments, town houses and parks in an area that lies between the city's financial center and the Embarcadero. This area was, during the Gold Rush era, San Francisco's ever-changing waterfront, and the developers of the project sought suitable names for their buildings, plazas, walks and bridges. At that time our sources were documents, histories, engravings, lithographs and two daguerreotype panoramas. It was these daguerreotypes alone that were beyond suspicion—memory could not fault them nor artistic liberty exaggerate things as they actually were at the time. These were indeed the fact.

The first of the panoramas is a two-part daguerreotype of the ship-filled harbor which we call "Forest of

Masts," reproduced here. The other is a five-part panorama taken from Rincon Point by William Shew, a pioneer photographer who maintained a gallery in San Francisco from 1850 through 1903. The "Forest of Masts," possibly taken in late 1850, is the earliest known photograph of San Francisco. The Shew panorama is dated 1851. "Forest of Masts" shows unmistakably the landbound NIANTIC and APOLLO, both destroyed in the great fire of May 3 and 4, 1851. These two ships had been beached, enclosed by the growing city, and roofed over for use as storeships. They were popular subjects for engravings, and were described by early San Franciscans as spectacles of wonder and astonishment. These well-known panoramas had often been reproduced, and had for years formed one of the more popular exhibits in the Museum.

It was at an early stage in our studies that Dr. John Haskell Kemble of Pomona College, author of *San*

Francisco Bay, A Pictorial Maritime History, visited our office and reviewed the accumulation of newspaper items, lithographs and other materials we had assembled. He rewarded us with a number of references to sources as yet unknown to us. One of these was a panorama in several parts, tentatively dated 1854, which had appeared in the June 1957 issue of *Image*, the publication of the George Eastman House. When assembled, these photographs showed the sweep of the San Francisco waterfront from North Beach to Rincon Point, with the now-familiar maze of the masts of sailing vessels moored off the muddy waterfront. This was the first glimpse for us of a view of Gold Rush San Francisco from Nob Hill. Eastman House sent us 8x10 enlargements of the five views. Here indeed was a treasure, a vast, almost "bird's-eye" view of early San Francisco for which even the Shew panorama had not prepared us. But our study of the "Forest of Masts" images had prepared us to look at this "1854" panorama to see what had developed in the places where NIANITIC and APOLLO had been. And here they still were! It was not the San Francisco of 1854, but that of at least three years earlier that was spread before us!

Here was the bay coming up Sacramento Street almost to Montgomery, Long Wharf stretching out into the mass of ships with flimsy crosswalks, later to become city streets, connecting various piers. Uptown can be seen a number of buildings, the Jenny Lind Theatre, the El Dorado and the Veranda, long familiar to us from

contemporary engravings. We dated this panorama as between January 19, 1851, when the First Presbyterian Church, there visible, was dedicated, and May 3, the date that the great fire that destroyed NIANITIC and APOLLO started. The possibility does exist of its being even earlier, for Soulé, in *Annals of California*, reports that when the church arrived prefabricated "in the fall [November] of 1850, the present site . . . was secured and the church erected." We know that the Eastman House panorama follows "Forests of Masts," for it shows siding on a wooden building on a pier where none existed in the two-part view, which has been dated as possibly December of 1850 by Mr. Bertil Lund, a San Francisco architect who is making a study of 1851 Montgomery Street. Only a day or two would be needed to add this siding, and it is therefore conceivable that the two were taken within that short time of each other, and that the Eastman House panorama is of late 1850.

Delighted with this discovery, we showed the prints to Mrs. Helen Giffen, Librarian of the Society of California Pioneers. Mrs. Giffen and I pored over the prints, remarking such details as the old City Hall on Kearny and Pacific Streets, the 1837 Casa Grande of Richardson just west of Portsmouth Square. She responded to our enthusiasm by placing in our hands a small box from the vaults of that Society's remarkable collection. It contained eight tissue-paper wrapped daguerreotypes which had been left with the Pioneers in 1891 by the Pacific Coast Amateur Photographic Association at the

time of its dissolution. These consisted of a three-part panorama of the harbor south of Market Street, a single view, and—a four-part panorama, taken from approximately the same spot on Nob Hill as the Eastman House panorama!

When printed and enlarged, the four-part panorama revealed a far different city from that of early 1851. Not only was there a complete change in the waterfront area, which had suffered the great fire of May 3 and 4, 1851, but an equally impressive change in the area to the north, where the fire of June 22, 1851, had raged, wiping out such landmarks visible in the Eastman House panorama as the short-lived First Presbyterian Church and the Old City Hall. The date of the panorama was established as the winter of 1851-1852 by the building of structures on the sites of those destroyed in the June 22, 1851 fire and the presence of the Richardson Adobe, which was pulled down in the spring of 1852.

A single daguerreotype view of the ship-filled bight inside Rincon Point, cited in *Daguerreotype in America*, is in the Southworth & Hawes Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. This looks like the far right-hand section of one of these panoramas. It is perhaps wishful thinking on our part that it belongs to the Pioneers view, which is missing the usual Rincon Point section, for Albert S. Southworth, the Boston daguerreotypist who joined the Argonauts in 1849, returned to Boston in January 1851, before the Pioneers panorama was taken. Still, this single view may have

been taken later and forwarded to him there by a friend who stayed behind. It is a tantalizing puzzle, and we can only await new evidence.

A visit from Mr. Newhall and Mr. Lund greatly enlarged our knowledge of views from Nob Hill. When we showed him the Pioneers panorama, Mr. Newhall produced a third panorama taken from almost the same spot as the other two! The original, he told us, was hanging in the home of art dealer Billy Pearson, some ten blocks away from our Museum. Like the Eastman House view, it embraces the whole sweep from North Beach to Rincon Point in six images. The date on the contemporary frame is given as 1853. When copied and printed in form for study, the scene reveals the excavation for the Montgomery Block filled with redwood piling and bordered by three pile drivers—enough to date it certainly as very early 1853. Here can be seen the city after the six great fires that swept over it between December 24, 1849 and June 22, 1851. It was a city that had finally built for permanence and was at last to have a respite from devastation for over fifty years—a period which has been called its Golden Era.

In the two years spanned by the panoramas here reproduced we see remarkable changes in the shipping and in the waterfront. The Eastman House panorama shows the unbelievable confusion that existed in early 1851; wharves reaching out over the shallows to deep water, and a maze of crosswalks from wharf to wharf; large buildings built on pilings far out from solid ground;

deepwater ships trapped in this maze or already encompassed by land; and a host of lighters, rowboats and other small craft going about, under and among the ships and wharves, a situation ripe for the devastating fire of May 3 and 4.

By the winter of 1851-1852, the waterfront is greatly changed. The Pioneers panorama shows that the bay has been pushed back to Battery or to Front Streets; blocks of buildings stand on solid ground where only a few months before the tides had washed under acres of structures propped upon pilings. There are fewer ships in the harbor, and they are anchored in a more orderly fashion, conforming to the Harbormaster's continually published appeals following the great fire.

By 1853, the waterfront is seen in the Pearson panorama to be no longer dominated by the deserted ships of the Gold Rush, but by active trading vessels. There are many with sails either in harbor furl or drying in the sun. Some storeships remain, but most of the hulks have already been broken up and others await that end as they lie in the bay south of Market Street wharf.

Recently Mr. Lund has brought still another panorama to our attention, one which he dates as March 1851. Originally it existed in five parts, of which only four remain, and these four only in paper copies made long ago from the now lost daguerreotypes. These copies are in the collection of the California Historical Society. They are remarkable for their fine delineation of the old City Hall and the region about Portsmouth Square, both

of which appear near the center of the plates. But, alas, because of the loss of detail in copying, they contribute little to our study of the shipping. For that detail we can only wait for the discovery of the original daguerreotypes.

The immediate goal of our waterfront study has been realized in the completion of a system of nomenclature, devised by Karl Kortum, Museum Director. It is based on San Francisco's sea history and has already been used in naming many of Golden Gateway's apartment houses, plazas and individual town houses. The study continues, and with each new discovery or acquisition of source material our knowledge of those almost legendary days "when the water came up to Montgomery Street" grows wider.

Of the panoramas here presented, the Eastman House plates were discovered in Paris, Mr. Pearson's were found in New York, that of the Pioneers lay in a vault in this very city. It is not too sanguine a hope that in some collections on the East Coast or in Europe may be other early views of San Francisco as yet unidentified or known. Is it too much to hope that this publication may help uncover and identify still earlier views of our waterfront? One of the daguerreotypists must have photographed the NIANTIC or the APOLLO — yet the only close-up views we have are drawings or lithographs, conceivably made from as-yet unearthed daguerreotypes. Where are they now?

The San Francisco Maritime Museum, September 1964

ERRATA and ADDENDUM :

We have mistakenly identified the Richardson Adobe in the panorama that the Society of California Pioneers so kindly let us publish. The Adobe is the diagonally situated building with six dormer windows that lies just to the left of the longest red line in the third section of the panorama.

The First Presbyterian Church, located in the Eastman House panorama, was on the west side of Stockton, between Broadway and Pacific.

Those familiar with San Francisco can better orient themselves in looking at the panoramas by knowing that the 29-story Shell Building now stands at Bush and Battery, the intersection at which the Oriental Hotel was located.